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Subject: N&O: NC officials deny environmental plan for Atlantic Coast Pipeline

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By John Murawski

Gov. Roy Cooper's administration has rejected an environmental plan by Duke Energy and three other energy companies to build an interstate pipeline to carry natural gas from West Virginia into North Carolina.

The letter of disapproval from the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality is the first decision on the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline from any state or federal government agency in the three states the project would traverse. Duke Energy is also expecting a decision this month from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission as to whether the \$5 billion pipeline project is necessary.

The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality said the 600-mile underground pipeline, which would travel through eight North Carolina counties, including Johnston and Nash, does not meet the state's standards for erosion and sediment control. The agency has asked Charlotte-based Duke and its business partners to resubmit the application with additional information within 15 days, or to contest the agency's disapproval and request a hearing within 60 days.

The erosion permit is one of three hurdles the Atlantic Coast Pipeline needs to clear in North Carolina. The project also needs an air quality permit for a compressor, a machine that pushes the gas through the pipeline, and also a water quality permit allowing Duke to drill through streams and wetlands.

Duke issued a statement Monday saying it will submit the information requested for the erosion and sedimentation permit. The company has said the pipeline is expected to start moving natural gas in late 2019.

"It's a normal part of the process for agencies to ask for additional information before making a final decision," the company said.

"We've provided most of the requested information already, and we expect to provide the rest later this week," Duke said. "That should resolve the issue and allow the agency to complete its review."

One of the opponents of the project characterized the agency's decision as more than a routine matter.

"At the very least, it represents a significant hurdle the Atlantic Coast Pipeline will have to overcome," said Doug Jackson, spokesman for the Sierra Club.

The Department of Environmental Quality issued the ruling Sept. 26 and posted it online Friday. The agency wants the application to include the project's effects on streams and wetlands, and to include various other calculations, maps and documentation.

Duke applied for the project with Virginia-based Dominion Energy, Georgia-based Southern Energy and Piedmont Natural Gas, the Charlotte natural gas utility that Duke acquired last year.

The pipeline, now in its third year of planning and development, would carry natural gas from the Marcellus Shale. The natural gas would be extracted through hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, and would be delivered to North Carolina to supply fuel to run electric power plants in this state, as well as to heat homes and businesses.

The pipeline is being fought by a host of environmental organizations, eliciting thousands of public comments, plus filings from Native American organizations as well as The Nature Conservancy, Clean Water North Carolina and other public interest groups.

“This is a high-profile fight through Virginia and North Carolina,” said Kelly Martin, director of the Sierra Club’s Beyond Dirty Fuels campaign. “I see this decision as the state indicating they’re doing a substantial review of the pipeline and its impacts on streams and waterways of North Carolina.”

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